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# Indo-Bangladesh: A Political and Diplomatic Era

Manisha Ghosh

( M. A, Political Science)

SACT, Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis Mahavidyalaya

## Abstract

India is a land of unity with diversity and Bangladesh is a coherent country with similar religion and culture. But India was the first country along with Bhutan to recognise Bangladesh as an independent Nation state and immediately ties a diplomatic relation with Bangladesh after the Liberation war 1971. Geographically India shares its largest boundary with Bangladesh of approximately 4,096 kilometre. They are also the common members of SAARC, BIMSTEC, IORA and the Commonwealth. In spite of friendly relationship they had been faced some critical issues.

At present descriptive analysis method is followed to complete this qualitative study, primary and secondary information has been taken from various books, journals, websites ,internets and other relevant sources. The major outcome of the study is India plays a very important role in the formation of Bangladesh from 1971-74 but after 1974 the relationship worsened because of the closer ties with islamic nation. And this time the military rule in Bangladesh over a decade worsened the relationship also. And since the liberation period unauthorised immigrants appears in the eastern and North Eastern part of the country that increased the social political and economic tensions of the country. Even in covid-19 pandemic situation India provided medical training to Bangladeshi professionals, test kits and medicines. So it is clear that indo-bangladesh bilateral relation faced many ups and downs over the last 50 years but their relationship had reached a new height through various agreements and understandings.

Keywords: Nation-state, diplomatic relations, bilateral relation, covid-19.

## Introduction

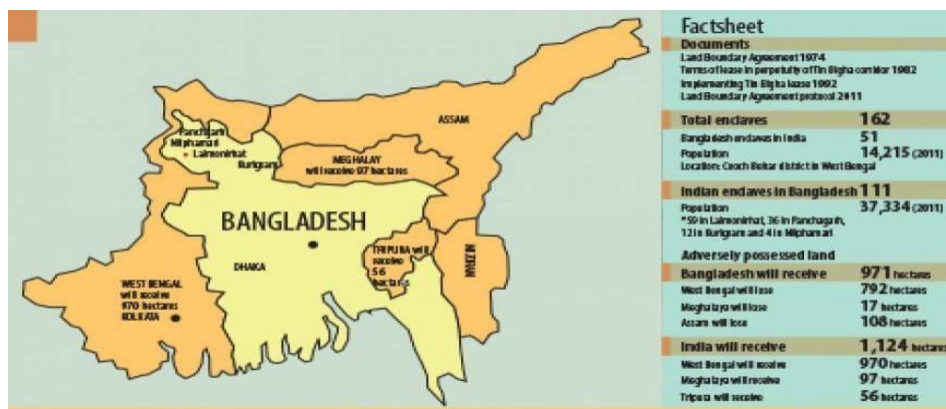
Divide and rule policy of the British was successfully divided into India on religion basis that is India and Pakistan. India was formed out of majority of Hindus and and Pakistan was formed out of majority of Muslims. Pakistan was geographically divided into two regions that are East and West Pakistan. East Pakistan is now Bangladesh consisted of Bengali Muslim population. Salman Rushdie in his book 'Shame' described Pakistan as a fantastic bird that has two wings without body. In 1971 India supported Pakistan in the Liberation war and also open the gate for about 10 million refugees from his Pakistan and also established diplomatic relation after independence. Two neighbouring countries share a common history, language and cultural heritage despite of being a good relationship some ups and downs happened

that worsen the relation. We focus on some issues that reveals the five decades of the relationships.

## Border Issues & LBA

India and Bangladesh share 4096 kilometre long porous border and shares its boundary with West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura. So Bangladesh is strategically and geographically very significant to India. Also after the 9/11 terrorist attacks in USA, the ISI was compelled to go out from Pakistan and Saudi Arabia and they had a better option to settle in Bangladesh where they could work with Lashkar-e-Taiba, Harkat-ul-Jehadi-e-Islami and other terrorist groups. The ISI established their camps Chittagong and Cox's Bazar of Bangladesh from where could easily enter India through West Bengal or North Eastern states, this type of infiltration changed the demographic configuration in West Bengal, Assam, Tripura and other North eastern states. After entering India this groups spread two different parts of India and tried to spread terror through bombing attacks. In December 2005 suicidal terrorist attacks at the IIS-Bangalore, in March Varanasi serial bombing blasts and in August 2006 Mumbai train bomb blast had showed a clear link with bangladeshi terrorist groups like Harkat-ul-Jehadi-e-Islami. Also between 2004-05, a lot of illegal trade and cattle was reported. This types of common factors like infiltration, unauthorized immigrants, smuggling of drugs and illegal weapons faced by India.

Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) was signed between the two country in 1974. In 2011 India and Bangladesh agreed to implement LBA and the treaty came into force after its ratification by the Indian parliament in 2015. This LBA envisages transfer of 111 Indian enclaves to Bangladesh in return of 51 enclaves to India. This has been addressed in Article 3 of the agreement which says that the government of Bangladesh and India agree that when areas are transferred, the people in these areas.



shall be given the right of staying on where they are, as nationals of the state to which the areas are transferred. In most of the cases this implementation is just a formality as the land is already under the possession of respective states.

Soon after the rectification of the LBA, an opposition arose by Assam Gana Parishad as Assam has lost about 268.39 acres and next after passing the 100<sup>th</sup> amendment by Indian Parliament it had a protest that had disrupted the normal life in Guwahati. Keeping all these issues in mind both countries adopt 'Shoot and Sight policy' basically to counter illegal movements across the border and this policy also led to a serious conflict between India's BSF and Bangladesh BDR . After the implementation of LBA the physical demarcation of India-Bangladesh border disputes has been resolved but associated problems with the border cause of tension between the two countries.

### **Water-sharing disputes**

54 International rivers flowing between India and Bangladesh, so water-sharing is a major issue on this bilateral relations. First issue was Farakka barrage issue on Ganges water. Farakka barrage was started its operation on 21st April 1975 , main purpose is to stake siltation in Hoogly river and also maintain port and several industrial needs of cities. After twenty years ago Ganga water sharing agreement was signed in 1996 and decided to share surface water at the Farakka barrage near their mutual border. According to this agreement 50:50 water have been shared if the flow is <70k cusecs. But it is solely an arrangement for the volumetric allocation of the river slow in the dry season.

Next in 1993 an Ad-Hoc agreement was signed about Teesta water-sharing, India receiving 39% of the water and Bangladesh 36% of it. The Teesta, a tributary of Brahmaputra river originates in the Pahunri Glacier and flows through the Sikkim and West Bengal before entering Bangladesh. So this river is important for both India and Bangladesh for agricultural use. But this deal has remained pending for more than two decades due to the opposition of West Bengal chief minister. West bengal government suggested to share the water of Torsa river that has connectivity with Bangladesh's Padma river and closer to border of Sikkim in Bangladesh . Even the construction of dam lead to the cause of entering lean seasonal flow into Bangladesh and have an adverse effect on downstream agriculture , fisheries and ecology of the region. And at the time of the Golden era of this bilateral relationship, the Teesta water sharing issue slips into China's tight embrace, Bangladesh made its

position clear. Moreover after the LBA, Teesta water sharing agreement will be remembered as a part of Sonali Adhyay in this bilateral relation.

### **Security issues & illegal migration**

India and Bangladesh security relations span since a long time excepting the ups and downs of the relationship. For the Liberation war of 1971, training of Mukti Bahini various joint exercises of Army (exercise sampriti) and navy(exercise Milan) take place between the two countries. For security reason a number of agreements have been signed between both the countries. The Coordinated Border Management Plan (CBMP) signed in 2011 aims to cooperate the efforts of both the Border Guarding forces for checking cross border illegal activities and crimes and for maintenance of peace and tranquility along the border.

Despite all these activities had taken by both government ( according to The Centre for Women and Children Studies) 27000 Bangladeshis had been forced into prostitution in India In 1998. Bangladesh as a place of Islamic fundamentalists, media report said that many terrorists escaped from Afghanistan taking shelter in Bangladesh. Illegal migrants from Bangladesh enter Indian territory to settle in rural areas of India that created serious ethnic tensions. The Bangladeshis settled in West Bengal, Assam, Meghalaya, Tripura and Mizoram. According to Bangladesh Government authorities, most of them come in search of jobs and mostly work in NGOs and garments and textile industries. Even it had been found from an annual report of the International Narcotics Control Board 2007, Bangladesh has become the prime transit route for trafficking heroin to Europe from Southeast Asia. On Indo- Bangladesh 2020 summit emphasis on the full implementation of the ongoing Coordinated Border Management Plan, Agreement on the facilitation of the border fencing completion at all pending sectors across the international border between India and Bangladesh and India has been requested to early implement removing the remaining restrictions on entry/ exit from land ports in India for Bangladeshis travelling on valid documents in a phased manner.

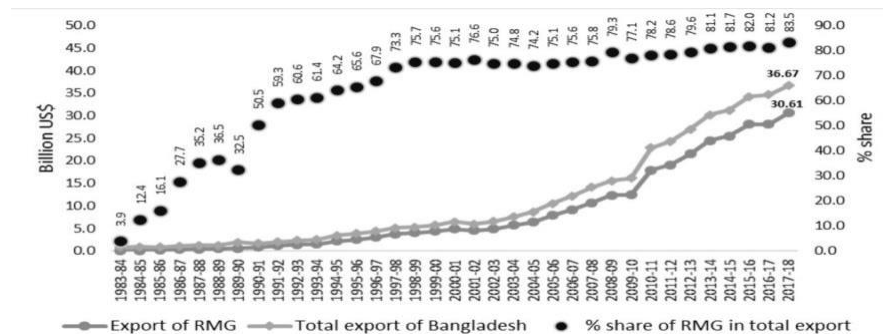
Illegal immigration from Bangladesh to India includes refugees and economic migrants continuous intacted from colonial times and there is no reliable figure about this immigrants. Most of them have settled along the border with Bangladesh and some subsequently moved to other parts of India that disturbing societal harmony. Number of Bangladeshis has been working as a casual labourers in agriculture, construction and other allied sectors of India. In 1965 the union government had taken a scheme to provide identity cards to the people residing along the Indo Bangladesh border arena basically for identifying Indian citizens from foreigners,

incidentally this scheme was not feasible that time and again revived in 1991 when the government specified areas in the states of Assam ,Mizoram, Tripura and West Bengal to check illegal migration. In 1999 National Identity Card Scheme (NICS) implemented and also in 2010 a project called 'Aadhar' was launched to provide a Unique Identity Number to each resident of India .In the Lok Sabha election 2014

,Narendra Modi declared that illegal migrants will have to pack their bags and leave after he wins the elections and this issue again in 2016 the event of West Bengal and Assam election BJP party declared. To provide illegal immigration numbers of initiative had taken by India but whenever India tried to forcibly ‘push back’ the illegal migrants, Bangladesh government refused to cooperate arguing that India was trying to 'push in' Bengali speaking Indian Muslims into the country.

### Economic relation

Over the last decade India is the second biggest trade partner of Bangladesh. The major commodities exported to Bangladesh in cotton ,electrical machinery ,vehicles,iron and steel, plastic and related article etc. While major imports to India include Apparels and clothing, textile fabrics, paper yarn, woven fabrics, animal/Vegetable fats ,oils fish etc .Bangladesh have tripled over the last decades. In 2019-20 , India's export to Bangladesh were 8.2\$ and imports were 1.26\$. A large volume of unrecorded trade both in commodities and services occurs every year between Bangladesh and india. An Indo Bangladesh CEO's forum was launched in December 2020 to provide policy level inputs in various areas of trade and investment and also to facilitate exchanges among the business communities of both the countries. To enhance linkages in textile sector , first India Bangladesh textile forum was held in 2020.



Bangladesh has appreciated duty free and quota free access given to Bangladesh exports to India under after since 2013. However, the World Bank in a study found a weak case for pursuing by detail FTA between India and Bangladesh based on the

potential economic benefits to both countries. Instead, this study argued that you unilateral trade liberalisation by both countries would yield much larger economic benefits wine minimising risks.

India's exports to Bangladesh arose 46% on an annualised basis at \$3.16 billion in January-March, securing it the fourth position after the US (\$15.41 billion), China (\$5.92 billion) and UAE (\$5.34 billion), according to the latest data from the commerce ministry. Indian merchandise exports to Bangladesh, which saw a 35.14% year-on-year growth to \$0.95 billion in January and 17% to \$0.94 billion in February

, witnessed a 93.45% annualised jump in March to \$1.26 billion. India, which follows the April-March financial year, saw Bangladesh at the fifth position in its list of top export destinations for FY-21, a jump from the ninth rank in 2019-20, with an annualised growth of 10.83% to \$9.09 billion. Bangladesh is one of the largest markets for India's agriculture products. India's agricultural exports to Bangladesh recorded the second highest growth of 95.93% in 2020-21 after Indonesia (102.42%), a government official said on condition of anonymity.

But Bangladesh's relationship with China adversely affected India's foreign policies with Bangladesh, though according to Bangladesh it is trying to maintain equal relationship between china and India. In 2008 Bangladesh set up a missing launch pad near Chittagong port with assistance from china. This has posed a security dilemma for India. However Bangladesh is India's most important trade partner in the South Asian region, and the governments of the two countries are taking diplomatic efforts to enhance trade and commerce for mutual benefits.

## **Developmental cooperation**

The landmark visits of the Prime Minister of both countries had provided the closest and friendly relationship between India and Bangladesh and the last details to countries have continued their political ,economic ,trade and cultural relation that promote the bilateral cooperation.

Government of both countries had taken various measures to restore the pre-1965 rail links and other connectivity between India and Bangladesh. 3 lines of credits (LOC) has extended by India to Bangladesh in the last 8 years amounting to US\$ 8 billion for development of infrastructure in various sectors including roads

,Railways, shippings and ports. Both countries agreed to continue working together towards achieving early reforms of the UN Security Council, combating climate in climate change, leíms attainment of the sustainable development goals and protection of the rights of migrants. The use of chattagram and Mangala ports in



Bangladesh for movement of goods to and from India particularly from North Eastern India and use of Bangladesh's Feni river for drinking water supply in Tripura has been sanctioned. To boost bilateral ties, old rail link of Chilahati-Haldibari was reopened and a new passenger train connecting Dhaka and West Bengal's New Jalpaiguri was inaugurated jointly by Prime Ministers of both the country. And Bangladesh is importing 1160 MW of power from India. Recently, Bangladesh agreed to provide a 10 GBPS internet connection to India's North Eastern States. Both the country realised that increasing connectivity through air, water, rail, road offers mutually beneficial opportunities for augmenting economic cooperation between Bangladesh and India particularly with the North Eastern States of India. Recently India and Bangladesh time 7 agreements to depend their partnership, these are:-

- a) Framework of Understanding (FOU) on Cooperation in Hydrocarbon Sector; Protocol on Trans-boundary Elephant Conservation.
- b) MOU regarding Indian Grant Assistance for Implementation of High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDPs) through Local Bodies and other Public Sector Institutions.
- c) MOU on Supply of Equipment and Improvement of Garbage / Solid Waste Disposal Ground at Lamchori Area for Barishal City Corporation.
- d) of Reference of India-Bangladesh CEOs Forum.
- e) MoU between Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Memorial Museum, Dhaka, Bangladesh and the National Museum, New Delhi, India.
- f) MoU on Cooperation in the field of Agriculture.

In the year 2021 will be historic in India Bangladesh relation for commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Liberation war and the establishment of diplomatic relation between India and Bangladesh, bonta country joint organise several activities. On Indian PM's visit to Bangladesh in March 2021, the following MoUs were signed:

- a) MoU on Cooperation in the Field of Disaster Management, Resilience and Mitigation;
- b) MoU between Bangladesh National Cadet Corps (BNCC) and National Cadet Corps of India (INCC)

- c) MoU on Establishment of a Framework of Cooperation in the Area of Trade Remedial Measures between Bangladesh and India;
- d) Tripartite MoU on Supply of ICT Equipment, Courseware & Reference Books and Training for Bangladesh-Bharat Digital Service and Employment Training (BDSET) Centre;
- e) MoU for the establishment of sports facilities at Rajshahi College field and surrounding areas.

In Covid-19 situation As part of bilateral assistance, the Government of India has extended three tranches of medical assistance including 30,000 surgical masks, 15,000 headcovers, 50,000 surgical latex gloves, 100,000 Hydroxychloroquine medicine tablets and RT-PCR test kits capable of running 30,000 tests in March- April 2020 to Bangladesh to assist in its efforts. The Government of India has also been conducting various online training modules to train the health professionals of Bangladesh on treatment and care of COVID-19.

## Conclusion

So, Bangladesh is strategically important for India as it shares border with North Eastern states to and it is the biggest development partner of India today India and Bangladesh need to continue working with cooperation, collaboration, and consolidation to materialise the recent gains. Both the country bonded by nature, history and culture should be bold enough to go for new areas of cooperation and connectivity in terms of land, road, waterways and it must be of culture and people to people connections as well. The connectivity and regional integration have emerged as the main pillars of the ties between India and Bangladesh and are likely to remain so in the future.

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